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COUNTRY COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS AND RELATED MATTERS

Assistance to Myanmar

Note by the Administrator

SUMMARY

In reporting on activities for assistance to Myanmar since the adoption of Executive Board decision 96/1 of January 1996, the Administrator notes that: (a) during 1997, all components of the 10 projects comprising the Human Development Initiative-Extension (HDI-E) were initiated, in conformity with Governing Council and Executive Board decisions 93/21 and 96/1; and (b) an independent HDI-E assessment mission of six senior international experts undertook an assessment of the 10 projects and HDI-E as a whole from 24 August-13 September 1997. The mission found that the projects of HDI-E continue to meet their objectives and provide key strategic lessons and experience for the future. A recommendation on the nature of future UNDP assistance to Myanmar may be found in chapter VII.



I. PURPOSE

1. In response to Executive Board decision 96/1, the present report contains an assessment of the extent to which the assistance provided to Myanmar continues to meet the provisions of Governing Council decision 93/21. In so doing, it takes into account the major findings and conclusions of a recent six-member international assessment mission (24 August-14 September 1997), which reviewed project activities undertaken within the framework of the Human Development Initiative (HDI) and HDI-Extension (HDI-E). Through the present report, the guidance and approval of the Executive Board is sought on the nature of future UNDP assistance to Myanmar.

II. INTRODUCTION

2. During 1997, all components of the projects comprising HDI-E were fully initiated. These projects had been approved by the Administrator in July 1996, in strict conformity with Executive Board decision 96/1.

3. An independent international team of six senior experts examined the procedural and institutional arrangements and the monitoring and assessment mechanisms for HDI-E as a whole and for each of the 10 projects, as well as the strategic lessons learned from HDI and HDI-E over the course of the past year. The contents of the present report are largely guided by the findings of the team, which were that, in great measure, the objectives and strategies of the 10 constituent projects of HDI-E continue to be in keeping with Governing Council and Executive Board instructions, and that they incorporate strategic lessons and experiences from HDI (1994-1996) and HDI-E (1996-1998) to date.

4. It should also be noted that other reviews and evaluations have been and are being carried out at the thematic and sectoral levels. For instance, an evaluation was undertaken recently to review the successes and challenges of the bottom-up planning process of HDI-E. Furthermore, under the HDI-E support project, a study of community-based organizations (CBOs) has been carried out to ensure continued empowerment, sustainability and capacity-building at the grass-roots level. At the sectoral level, an evaluation of the primary health-care project was carried out by a team of independent consultants during September and October 1997, at the same time as the preparation of the present report. An evaluation of all United Nations-assisted interventions in HIV/AIDS prevention and care and a review of United Nations-wide interventions in reproductive health are being planned as well. In addition, a study is being scheduled to review the impact of HDI and HDI-E on income generation, environmental stability and food security, starting with the southern Shan State.

III. ASSESSMENT OF HDI-E (1996-1998)

5. HDI-E became effective in October 1996. However, 4 out of the 10 individual projects, namely, the Dry Zone environment and food security, micro-credit, HDI-E support and HIV/AIDS projects, were initiated only during May through July 1997. HDI-E is targeted at 23 townships located in the central Dry Zone, southern Shan State, the Ayeyarwaddy Delta and Rakhine, Chin and

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Kachin States, and comprises three clusters of projects in the following areas: human development and humanitarian needs; environment and food security; and activities of an intersectoral nature. All 10 projects are being executed by United Nations specialized agencies, namely, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). These executing agencies have assigned full-time international chief technical advisers (CTAs) to each project to oversee field activities and to manage project resources. Cooperation and partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both international and national, are being strengthened, especially with regard to facilitating community participation at the grass-roots level. An HDI-E support project under the intersectoral cluster is aimed at improving management, organization, monitoring and evaluation practices of HDI-E, as well as ensuring the sharing and cross-fertilization of experiences gained between and among all HDI-E projects. In addition, annual observation visits to project areas by officials of interested diplomatic missions accredited to Myanmar continue to provide another layer of monitoring. As in the past, regular briefings for civil society organizations on the progress of HDI-E interventions were organized by the UNDP Resident Representative.

6. As required by Executive Board decision 96/1, all projects are being implemented in conformity with Governing Council decision 93/21, from which the three overall objectives of HDI-E flow: (a) creating a visible and measurable impact on the well-being of the people, the poor and disadvantaged in particular, in the specific sectors of health, education and training, food security, HIV/AIDS, and the environment; (b) promoting participatory approaches, by involving communities in the identification and implementation of grass-roots initiatives of direct benefit to them; and (c) strengthening local capacities required to sustain community-focused development to improve the living conditions and household incomes of rural communities. The paragraphs below highlight how, in operational terms, these overarching human development objectives are being pursued and achieved.

7. Primary health care. Accessibility to health-care services for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged has improved significantly. The 1,153 Village Health Committees (VHCs) constituted in four new focus townships and existing VHCs that have been revitalized in seven former focus townships play a crucial role in implementation of project activities. There has been a visible impact from activities pertaining to malaria and leprosy that have been brought within the primary health-care project under HDI-E. Training, retraining and the provision of drugs, supplies and equipment have greatly improved the capacities of community health workers (CHWs), midwives, other basic health staff and medical officers to tackle priority health problems. Community refresher courses for existing CHWs and AMWs, the selection and training of new voluntary health workers (CHWs and AMWs), and supplying health kits are part of the scheme to strengthen grass-roots infrastructure through capacity-building and empowerment. The acute problem of iodine deficiency is being addressed through a number of strategically targeted interventions, including community awareness-raising and training; cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in this area has been greatly enhanced. Leprosy control and treatment

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is being successfully carried out, further supported by the community-based rehabilitation of persons affected with leprosy, through income-generation promotion efforts supplemented by small loan funds. Through township launching workshops at all HDI-E townships, the project has provided tools to empower communities to become self-reliant and develop sustainable practices for their own development, such as community needs assessment exercises, the Village Health Fund Initiative Programme and the renovation of health centres.

8. HIV/AIDS. Project activities have led to enhanced community awareness through improved information, education and communication approaches and capacity-building for community-based HIV/AIDS support programmes. In-depth, location-specific surveys in high-risk areas are ensuring closer monitoring, thereby allowing for timely actions to prevent the spread of the disease.

9. Water supply and sanitation. Through community initiative support facilities established under the HDI-E project, significant achievements have been made in mobilizing and strengthening communities to sustain healthful water supply and sanitation practices. A total of 3,750 villages in 560 village tracts have been targeted in the 11 focus townships for project interventions. Needs assessment surveys have been carried out in 1,127 villages to identify potential resources and a range of affordable solutions to water supply and sanitation problems for villagers. Water user-groups have been formed within each community to ensure wider participation of project beneficiaries, particularly women.

10. Education and training. Project activities under the education project are well-targeted in all of the village tracts in the 11 focus townships of the central Dry Zone, southern Shan State and the Delta. There have been improvements in the level of school enrolment, as well as a 30 per cent reduction in drop-out rates. Parents and Teachers Associations (PTAs) are being strengthened, thereby encouraging wider participation in matters relating to primary education. Another HDI-E project activity involves the provision of advice and guidance to communities in planning school facility improvements to ensure that school design meets the local environmental and social needs of the communities. It should be noted, however, that low rates of school attendance in many remote villages are related to rural poverty and, particularly in the Delta region, school attendance continues to be hampered by a lack of physical access, such as the absence of small bridges across waterways.

11. Micro-credit. The micro-credit project is almost exclusively targeted at the poorest of the poor. It is well-designed to meet the needs of the rural poor for self-employment and income-generating activities. Project interventions will strengthen capacity at the community and village levels to self-manage micro-credit schemes to improve village productivity. Micro-credit schemes are being established with the close cooperation and technical assistance of three international NGOs, namely, Grameen Trust of Grameen Bank, Bangladesh; Private Agencies Collaborating Together (PACT), the United States of America; and Groupe de recherches et d'échanges technologiques (GRET), France. Project activities will benefit over 30,000 of the poorest households within the 30-month period of HDI-E.

12. Environment and food security. Environmental issues are being addressed through a strategy of reversing environmental degradation, while at the same time ensuring the sustainability of natural resources. This has a direct impact on poverty alleviation since much of the rural population is dependent on the forestry resources from its immediate surroundings. Several project activities address varying degrees of environmental degradation and food security issues in specific project locations. As a result, the capacities and awareness of communities about ways to better manage and make more sustainable use of fragile and vulnerable natural resources have been improved among the target groups in the central Dry Zone and southern Shan State. Priority is given to income-generating activities involving the use of renewable resources, such as agricultural crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries, coupled with the rehabilitation of the environment and its natural resources. In the central Dry Zone, 40 new Farmers' Income-Generation Groups (FIGGs) have been formed and 3,500 bags of fertilizers as well as some seeds have been distributed to them; nearly 150 farmers have received training in livestock raising; two community woodlots, totalling 60 acres, have been established; and 2,000 fuel-efficient A-1 stoves have been procured for distribution. In southern Shan State, 30 micro-projects have been successfully implemented by communities, 125 are continuing and 17 are in the pipeline. Continuing support is being provided to 29 FIGGs and 22 Women's Income-Generation Groups (WIGGs), formed under the earlier phase of HDI. Capacity-building through training is ongoing: an observation tour of 25 farmers from a new township visited an established HDI project site; 27 field staff were trained to carry out appraisals of projects in rural areas; and 25 farmers have been trained in making fuel-efficient A-1 stoves. In the Ayeyarwaddy Delta, where the mangrove forests were exploited for the manufacture of charcoal wood stoves, HDI-E project activities are making significant progress in rehabilitating the badly damaged environment. Over 500,000 mangroves and non-mangrove seedlings have been distributed for planting in 400 acres of mangrove forests and village woodlots; 225 acres of mangrove forests are being protected by communities for revival; 42 village development committees, comprising 180 community groups, have been formed for income generation, women's development, forest conservation and extension activities by villagers; 2,000 alternative-fuel stoves (rice husk) have been manufactured and distributed by villagers; and 900 income-generation activities have been implemented by poor and landless families in fisheries, livestock and agriculture. Again, a key strategy is to give priority to promoting income-generating activities for poor, marginalized communities. Villagers have been mobilized in the project townships to form interest groups concerned with income improvement - the groups identify their strengths and opportunities for developing income, then participate in intensive HDI-E training programmes through which they also receive credit in kind. This has led to a considerable increase in income-generating activities in the project villages, where revolving credit funds now exist, managed by the village groups themselves. Communities have actively participated in the rehabilitation of their environment. Mangroves are being replanted on the river banks, and eucalyptus and fruit-bearing trees have been planted elsewhere to rehabilitate and stabilize the land and to provide for future needs for fuelwood, food and construction materials. Rural populations in these environmentally devastated regions now understand the issues and problems better, and are adapting their practices to improve and rehabilitate the environment while at the same time

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improving their own household incomes and preparing for a better future for their children.

13. Community development in remote border areas. This new project extends UNDP assistance to the marginalized ethnic minority communities inhabiting the remote border areas in Chin, Rakhine and Kachin States. Project interventions in selected townships in these regions allow for immediate channelling of much-needed humanitarian and development assistance to these otherwise unreached communities, while at the same time allowing for the testing and development of an integrated, rapid, but sustainable, area-based development approach. With a vast area of difficult terrain to cover, the initiation of this project proved to be a formidable task. The project team of expatriate United Nations Volunteers (soon to be strengthened by the addition of an international area manager for northern Rakhine), and the national professional staff, led by a full-time international CTA, worked together with a large number of community-level field staff (community development workers (CDWs)) to establish a strong presence in their project areas through community group formation activities and needs assessment surveys. Additionally, as a constituent project of HDI-E, this project receives strong substantive collaboration from the HDI support project in terms of training, research, monitoring and evaluation and information, education and communication activities. Attention is being given to strengthening the technical advice and support linkages with the sectoral projects of HDI-E in primary health care, basic education, agriculture and forestry, water and sanitation, among other areas.

14. HDI support. The key goal of the HDI support project is to ensure that the development process is fully participatory and that HDI-E meets the needs of the poorest segments of the rural target communities. Towards this end, the project engages two full-time monitoring and evaluation officers who are accountable solely to UNDP. These officers monitor and help to ensure that the assistance provided reaches the target beneficiaries in a non-discriminatory manner, and that participation in project activities is engendered in a non-exclusive and open manner. A cadre of national staff stationed in the field - one human development officer (HDO) in each township, assisted by 10 CDWs working at the community level in every township - also ensure continuous UNDP presence and oversight. Considerable efforts have been made through the HDI-E support project to bring about greater cohesiveness and coordination of project activities at the township and village levels. While integration at the village level is proceeding very well, the strategy still needs to be fully established at the township and project management levels. Important progress has been made in developing appropriate mechanisms and systems for the project's main support functions, namely, in integrated development management; research and analysis; training; information education and communication; and monitoring and evaluation, as well as in providing common services, including logistical and administrative support facilities for the sectoral projects.

15. Partnership with NGOs. NGOs, both international and national, are increasingly playing a vital role in promoting participatory and community development activities, introducing bottom-up planning, and building local capacity at the community level. Improved mechanisms have been established for involving NGOs as major implementing partners, particularly in activities relating to HIV/AIDS, basic health and community-based income-generating

activities. The estimated total of HDI-E budget allocations for international NGOs stands at \$6 million, which is well over the amount of \$1.8 million disbursed for international NGO-related activities during the HDI period (1994-1996). Efforts are under way to increase even further the number of NGOs entering into partnerships with HDI-E projects, among which is a study tour being organized to facilitate the collaboration of Asian NGOs in Myanmar.

IV. STRATEGIC LESSONS FROM HDI AND HDI-E

16. The HDI assessment mission concluded that HDI was a successful evolving model for dealing with poverty alleviation at the grass-roots level, bringing benefits to all without exclusion or discrimination. This was clearly evident in the villages and village tracts in the target townships of HDI-E project activities. A key strategy has been to involve grass-roots participation in the development process, thereby providing opportunities to increase the participation of people in villages in identifying their needs and deciding on the management of resources being channelled for their welfare and development.

17. The mechanism for involving grass-roots participation has been to build local capacities through the formation of user-groups that interact with HDI-E projects and then participate in decision-making on social and economic development activities in their communities. Thus the community and village groups comprising the poorest of the poor have begun to form themselves as social institutions, energizing the social systems of the villages.

18. Project interventions have generated and instilled development consciousness among the local villagers. This has led to the articulation and preparation of village development plans by the villagers themselves, with minimum support from HDI-E projects. The challenge ahead is for rural populations to broaden these micro-initiatives into the community level. In this context, HDI and HDI-E have successfully instituted innovative strategies and mechanisms for the transfer of skills and experiences from one community to another. Technology transfer, embedded in products delivered through HDI-E projects, such as ferro-cement tanks for improved rainwater catchment, and the making of simple, inexpensive yet effective fuel-efficient stoves have proved to be practical and effective. The current strategy of HDI-E is to further disseminate information on these innovative technologies through information, education and communication materials and study tours, in order to facilitate the sharing of experiences from one village community to another.

19. The nature of a programme such as HDI-E, which depends on building grass-roots institutions through participatory means, requires longer periods of follow-through interventions, tailor-made to the degree of progress in different locations and conditions. Planning of future programme interventions, therefore, should take into account the underlying longer-term perspective necessary for achieving sustainability. The continuity of sustained follow-through as well as mechanisms to broaden successful interventions will need to be built into future project strategies in order to sustain their positive impact.

20. HDI-E activities funded and coordinated by UNDP and implemented by United Nations specialized agencies and UNOPS are successfully establishing durable institutional and implementation structures for coordinated development efforts at the township and village levels. These should provide the basis for the efficient delivery and absorption of possible future assistance from multiple partnerships in support of local and national development efforts. Such an example can be seen in a coordinated and collaborative effort of WHO, UNICEF and UNDP to develop a common programme strategy for implementing an essential drugs programme involving community cost-sharing. Greater convergence in the United Nations system programme and implementation arrangements at the country level would be facilitated by a commonly shared United Nations-wide strategic policy framework, reflecting United Nations system overall developmental goals and approach in the country, a prospect currently on the agenda of the United Nations country team in Myanmar.

V. CONCLUSION

21. The HDI assessment mission confirmed that the objectives and strategies of the 10 projects comprising HDI-E are in keeping with Executive Board decision 96/1. The strategy for programme coordination and monitoring is progressing well and considerable success has been achieved in fully integrating and converging all activities under HDI-E projects. Enhanced cooperation and partnerships with NGOs is being effected, especially with regard to facilitating community participation at the grass-roots level. Continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation is deemed essential, not only to measure impact and to facilitate timely decisions for adjustments during implementation of HDI-E projects, but more importantly to ensure non-discriminatory and non-exclusionary participation by all target beneficiaries in HDI-E activities. The HDI-E support project is providing this important function and much progress has been made in developing appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems to address this need. The continuing strategic lessons and experiences from HDI and HDI-E will, over time, allow for the development of a successful model for ensuring sustainability in poverty alleviation interventions at the grass-roots level and for advancing grass-roots development. The planning of future programme interventions should take into account the underlying longer-term perspective required to achieve greater impact and to ensure sustainability of project achievements.

VI. HDI: CONTINUING ACTIVITIES

22. Executive Board decision 96/1 authorized the Administrator to approve projects for a total amount not exceeding \$52,076,000 during the period 1996-1997. These resources will enable the support of HDI-E activities until mid-1999. There continues to exist a critical and urgent need to help people to help themselves through a sustained human development assistance effort on a broader scale. HDI and HDI-E already have the necessary mechanisms and structures in place to achieve such an impact. Given the lead time required for the formulation, appraisal and approval of new projects, the Administrator seeks the agreement of the Board to submit a proposal for future UNDP assistance to Myanmar, with a view to enhancing capacity-building and sustainability.

VII. EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION

23. The Executive Board may wish to:

1. Approve the continued use of resources approved under its decision 96/1 to support Human Development Initiative-Extension activities until mid-1999;

2. Request the Administrator to submit, at its annual session 1998, a proposal for future UNDP assistance to Myanmar.
